Entrusted norms

Entrusted Norms: Security, Trust, and Betrayal in the Gulf Cooperation Council Crisis

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Abstract

Combining scholarship on norms and trust in international relations, this article puts forward the concept of entrusted norms as a novel means to understand certain dynamics of cooperation and conflict in international politics. Entrusted norms differ from non-entrusted norms both in the manner that they are policed and in the reaction to their infringement. In the first case, there are few formal hedging mechanisms taken against potential defection. In the second case, when broken, they result in a betrayal reaction where a return to the behavioral status quo is insufficient to return to the political status quo. We illustrate the analytical usefulness of entrusted norms through an examination of the established norms of diplomacy within the Gulf Cooperation Council, paying particular attention to interactions between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the post-Arab Spring period. We argue that the perception of Qatar's defection from an entrusted norm, the preservation of individual and collective dignity, contributed to the 2014 diplomatic rupture between these two states and set in motion a betrayal/attempted reconciliation cycle, where even Qatar's attempts to move back to the behavioral status quo prior to the fallout have been insufficient to fully repair the relationship. In addition to providing a novel interpretation to this case, this paper highlights the need for further theoretical consideration of the severity and duration of punishment after norm transgression within social constructivism, reinforces the theoretical connection between social structures and emotions, and advocates for an expansion in the domains of trust that we study.

Introduction

On June 5th, 2017, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt each announced the suspension of diplomatic relations with Qatar (2017). This was quickly followed by a marine, land and air blockade and the removal of Qatar from the Arab coalition in Yemen. This crisis followed a period of unstable relations between key states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Qatar, starting with the withdrawal of Saudi, Bahraini, and Emirati ambassadors from Qatar in 2014. Qatar was asked to fulfil numerous demands to lift the current blockade, the scope of which led many commentators to argue that complying would result in a complete loss of sovereignty. Qatar, unsurprisingly, did not agree to the terms and the conflict became entrenched for over three years until recent diplomatic initiatives in 2021 took small steps to repair the relationship. While the issues underlying this conflict were not new, they had historically been dealt with internally, without these open and arguably

dramatic ultimatums (Ulrichsen, 2019: 26). So, what might account for this dramatic and sustained break in diplomatic relations between the states of the GCC?

While most of the literature on the GCC crisis is written from a realist perspective, this article seeks to put forward a novel explanation for this complete breakdown in a formerly stable pattern of diplomatic relations by introducing the concept of entrusted norms. Over the past decades, social constructivist scholars have developed a vast literature suggesting that international politics is, at least in part, structured by social norms. States can be socialized into ways of acting and behaving that, though always political and often contested, can set normative standards that facilitate cooperation. This paper builds on this work by considering what effect trust might have on these norms. In social constructivist literature so far, while norms might be weak or strong, respected instrumentally or internalized, they have yet to be conceived of as entrusted.

We argue that entrusted norms are worthwhile as empirical objects of study for two reasons. First, entrusted norms are policed differently. Second, defections against these norms produce unique political effects. Entrusted norms will be highly socialized and have weak institutional checks – their entrusted nature means that states simply assume that the others will behave appropriately, and thus states will have little need to implement hedging strategies against potential defection. However, if defection occurs, the reaction is not just characterized by disappointment over the norm being broken, but by betrayal. While most social constructivist literature recognizes that a norm-breaking actor will pay some type of cost for their behavior, we argue that betraying entrusted norms has a unique effect: even if the betrayer returns to the behavioral status quo, this is insufficient to restore the political status quo.

We argue that the crisis in the GCC can be understood through the politics of entrusted norms in the organization, specifically, the preservation of individual and collective dignity that drove decision making by consensus, particularly over contentious issues of internal security. We seek to demonstrate that this norm reflects long-term social understandings held among the GCC states and there were few institutional hedging strategies in place to control the possibility of defection.

Furthermore, these entrusted norms created social expectations of behavior, which, when perceived to have been broken by Qatar during the Arab Spring, led to a reaction by Saudi Arabia and counter-reaction by Qatar that exhibit the hallmarks of a betrayal and attempts at reconciliation. Finally, the inability of these states to reach a resolution for so long, despite moves by Qatar to return to the status quo behavior, suggests that the continuation of the conflict is not simply about whether these norms are still followed. Indeed, the severity of the demands placed on Qatar, which called for a high degree of capitulation of future agency, suggest that this perceived betrayal created an atmosphere of long-term distrust that cannot be rectified by Qatar simply returning to the behavioral status quo.

In addition to providing a novel analysis of the security politics among the GCC members, this paper also speaks to larger theoretical issues within international politics. First, it provides one possible answer to a reasonably understudied question in social constructivism, namely, what are the specific effects of norm violation on the norm breaker, and how can we theoretically explain their duration and severity? Second, it reinforces the connection between the literature on emotions and the literature on norms, providing an illustration of how the social environment affects the construction of emotional responses, and the subsequent effects of emotional responses on the social environment. Lastly, it provides a new conceptual tool for trust scholars that can generate analytical leverage in other organizational settings or in international relations more broadly, and it calls for the need to examine different domains of trust outside of those most often considered in traditional security studies.

To make this argument, we proceed in three sections. The first section shows that social constructivism has yet to consider how trust might affect norms, which opens up the space for our claim that scholars should also consider entrusted norms. The second section develops our concept of entrusted norms. The third section demonstrates that there were norms surrounding the preservation of individual and collective dignity among the GCC states that were entrusted before proceeding to show how betrayal and attempted reconciliation frame the recent conflict, and, in

particular, how attempts to make amends and a return to status quo behavior were not sufficient to reconcile the conflict between the states.

Trust, Norms, and Punishment

The academic work on norms in international politics is extensive. While some scholars have focused on defining what norms are and how they affect actors (Kratochwil, 1991; Wendt, 1999; Checkel, 2001), others have been interested in how they rise and fall (Florini, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; de Nevers, 2007; Heller et al., 2012; Coleman, 2013; Panke and Petersohn, 2016; Wight, 2016), or how they are resisted or challenged by status quo actors (Elgström, 2000; Wiener, 2004; Wiener, 2014; Bloomfield, 2016). However, despite an increased interest in the concept of trust in international relations, trust and norms have yet to be considered together in a sustained manner.

As part of our argument focusses on how breaking entrusted norms results in different behavior than what might otherwise be expected, it is necessary to review how constructivists have thus far understood the effects of breaking norms. First, it is clear that any state that violates a reasonably well-established norm will pay some type of material or social cost (Risse and Sikkink, 1999: 17; Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 16; Zarakol, 2014; Keating, 2016). Martha Finnemore and Katharine Sikkink note that domestic norm-breakers (entrepreneurs) will often face "social ostracism or legal punishment." (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 897) Because punishment can follow norm breaking, one focus of this literature concerns how the relative political power of the different international or domestic coalitions becomes important in the success or failure of the new norm (Jepperson et al., 1996: 56), which has led to research on whether materially-powerful states can better withstand these costs (Sandholtz, 2007: 17-18; Keating, 2014: 4-6), and how weak or vulnerable states can fall victim to the coercion of the strong (de Nevers, 2007).

But what is the duration of this punishment? The literature has remarkably little to say on the matter, even in work that focuses on the factors that lead states to violate norms (Shannon, 2000; Evers, 2017; Kutz, 2014). But there is a sense that when a state moves from norm-breaking to norm-

compliance, the punishment for its norm-breaking should end. As Thomas Risse and Katharine Sikkink put it, norm-violating actors simply "adjust their behavior to the international human rights discourse," (Risse and Sikkink, 1999: 12) at which point there is an implied idea that external costs also end – so long as they stay the course.

It is here that we wish to step into the debate. Our argument is that if we open ourselves up to the idea that norms can be entrusted, it suggests the potential for more complicated political action than the model above. This can help us to understand dynamics in international politics that might otherwise be overlooked. To proceed, however, we need to define what we mean by trust and explain what it means for a norm to be entrusted.

Following Aaron Hoffman, we argue that trust is a willingness to place the fate of important interests in another's hands, based on some belief that the other will not use this discretion to harm the truster (Hoffman, 2002: 376-377). Our definition of interest is broad, including those actions that might directly harm an actor and those that potentially corrupt normative standards that the actor believes to be important. The behavioral manifestation of trust is a trusting relationship, where actors choose to allow others to have this discretion over their interests. These relationships are not binary, but can vary with respect to their intensity, so that stronger relationships will lead to more of a willingness to give this discretion to the trustee, and vice versa (Hoffman, 2002: 377).

While there is no doubt that the process of developing a trusting relationship has a rational component, involving the calculation of expected values based on the knowledge of the other's previous behavior and current interests (Coleman, 1990; Hardin, 2002; Kydd, 2005), this article proceeds from a perspective found within the social trust literature, which focusses on how social factors influence the conference of trust.[1] These factors do not change the external risk that the actor faces, but instead cognitively lower the actor's perception of risk. So instead of continually reassessing the prevailing risk, actors forming a trusting relationship within a particular domain will

[1] For an overview of the different models of trust in international politics, see Ruzicka J and Keating VC (2015) Going global: Trust research and international relations. *Journal of Trust Research* 5(1): 8-26.

increasingly take for granted that the others' behavior will meet the expectations set by the relationship. This can occur, for example, because of preexisting social bonds between the actors, or other sources of strong positive affect that generate a familiarity, independent of direct experience, that 'fills in' a lack of information about previous behavior or likely intent in a positive way (Keating and Ruzicka, 2014: 755; Keating and Thrandardottir, 2017: 141; Luhmann, 1979: 19; Anheier and Kendall, 2002: 349; Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 972). Theoretically, this process can occur to the extent that "contingently possible future events are thought of as zero for all practical purposes ... because to trust is to live *as if* certain rationally possible futures will not occur" (Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 969). This thinking grounds our conception of entrusted norms. When and where a norm is entrusted, it involves the building of a trusting relationship with respect to the norm that results in the actors cognitively ignoring the risk that others could defect from the norm. To the extent that this trusting relationship over the norm is strong, the more likely this will be the case.

But what might an entrusted norm look like in practice? We operationalize the concept through hedging and betrayal. Hedging arises as a key factor because it is a behavioral reaction to mistrust in the relationship. If actors face some level of mistrust in their relationships, then they are likely to pursue some type of self-insurance against the potential for the other to defect, that is, they will hedge against the risk. Hedging involves paying a cost in the present that decreases the severity of a potentially negative future event, such as ensuring that extra military forces are available in case of abandonment, or simultaneously cultivating alternative relationships. Hedging behavior provides a solution to the pervasive uncertainty faced by states by reducing, at a cost, the variability in potential outcomes (Keating and Ruzicka, 2014).

Because hedging is intimately linked with an actor's perception of risk, we follow several recent studies that use it as a behavioral cue to identify changes in trusting relationships (Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2016; Brugger et al., 2016; Edwards, 2018; Juntunen and Pesu, 2018; Wheeler, 2018). The more that actors believe the other to be trustworthy with respect to some anticipated behavior, the less actors should rely on hedging activities related to this behavior (Keating and Ruzicka, 2014:

761). If actors are reducing their hedging behavior with respect to one another, and importantly, if the social understanding of the hedge appears to be in alignment with this reduction, then we can make some claims that the actors are transforming their relationship in a more trusting way – and vice versa (Keating and Ruzicka, 2014: 762).[2]

The second factor that arises from our approach is betrayal. We take our definition of betrayal from A. R. Elangovan and Debra Shapiro (1998: 548), who argue that betrayal is "A voluntary violation of mutually known pivotal expectations of the trustor by the trusted party (trustee), which has the potential to threaten the well-being of the trustor." In line with many of the arguments made by scholars who have studied emotions in international politics (Cohen, 1987; Mercer, 2005; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Mercer, 2006; Crawford, 2000; Åhäll and Gregory, 2013; Åhäll and Gregory, 2015), the mere existence of betrayal as an emotional reaction suggests that trust is something more than a simple calculative exercise, or the result of misplaced expectations. Indeed, this is why it is easy to imagine feeling betrayed by a friend, but difficult to imagine feeling betrayed by your alarm clock failing to wake you up in the morning (Holton, 1994: 66).

The existing literature suggests that betrayal is particularly powerful if there is a perception that the betrayed partner has been shamed or treated with disrespect, which can result in humiliation, particularly if done publicly (Fitness, 2001: 79).[3] Actors in this situation are likely to suspend positive exchange, such as cooperation, and sometimes engage in negative exchange, like retribution or revenge (Dirks et al., 2009: 70). This emotional weight of betrayal means that retaliation against the

[2] This has important differences from an existing concept, institutionalized norms, which might seem to overlap with our concept of entrusted norms. While norms can be institutionalized, such that actors "no long[er] think seriously about alternative behaviors," Finnemore M and Sikkink K (1998) International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. *International Organization* 52(4): 887-917. it does not necessary mean that they trust others to do the same. Entrusted norms, therefore, are those that all parties accept as institutionalized, and, within the parties of the trusting relationship, there is little/no action taken against the possibility of defection.

[3] Khaled Fattah and Karen Fierke have made a similar argument in international politics, arguing that, "The power of humiliation lies in a public exposure, and acknowledgement by an audience that humiliation has taken place." Fattah K and Fierke KM (2009) A Clash of Emotions: The Politics of Humiliation and Political Violence in the Middle East. *European Journal of International Relations* 15(1): 67-93.

perceived betrayal does not have to be politically prudent, and it is likely that the former trusting relationship will be severely damaged, which will further impede attempts at reconciliation.

To sum up, we would like to argue that the concept of entrusted norms adds to the social constructivist literature on norm breaking by suggesting two novel properties. First, entrusted norms will be lightly policed. There will be little to no hedging activity against the possibility of defection. Second, if defection occurs, it does not result in a reaction of disappointment, but betrayal, which leads to a complete halt in cooperation and likely vengeance seeking. As we noted in the introduction, this model opens up an underexplored question within social constructivism concerning the duration and severity of the effects of norm violation. While most of the research suggests that the form of punishment is temporally linked to the breaking of the norm itself, the introduction of entrusted norms and a betrayal reaction suggests that reactions to norm transgression can be much more severe in both quality and duration.

Additionally, it provides a vivid illustration of how the social environment structures certain emotional responses, in this case, the presence of the entrusted norm leading to a betrayal reaction, and how these emotional responses then affect the subsequent social environment, which can be seen in how betrayal then hinders the potential for reconciliation. A return to norm compliance by the betrayer will not automatically lead to a suspension of imposed costs by those who feel betrayed. In other words, a return to the behavioral status-quo will not be sufficient to return to the political status quo, which, as we aim to show in the case of the GCC crisis, has important consequences.

Method

In moving forward with the empirical material, we need to show how we operationalize the key variables that we will use to make our argument, namely, trust, norms, and betrayal. From the perspective of the theory, the GCC crisis is used as an instrumental case study offering a thick description of a particular phenomenon designed around our theoretical perspective to "provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory." (2010) We use secondary

academic literature to suggest that there is a widespread and long-term understanding of the following norm among members of the GCC: the preservation of individual and collective dignity that drives decision making by consensus, particularly over contentious issues of internal security. But to make the claim that the norm is entrusted, we need to see whether there are institutional measures that states could use to self-insure against the possibility of defection.

Hedging strategies are a common feature of international politics since, as Hoffman noted, "all agreements contain at least the potential for overseeing and sanctioning actor performance." (Hoffman, 2002: 390) Monitoring and sanctioning tend to be common in international organizations to ensure that states are keeping their commitments (Tallberg, 2002: 612). Some are centralized and active, known as 'police-patrol' models, while others are decentralized and reactive, known as 'fire-alarm' models (Tallberg, 2002: 610; McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984). Previous scholarship has suggested that the type of monitoring employed in an agreement can tell us something about the nature of the trusting relationship, with the implementation of fire-alarm strategies suggesting a more trustful position than police-patrol strategies (Hoffman, 2002: 388-391). Finally, trust might be so high that no hedging strategies will be in place with respect to a particular type of defection. In these situations, it is simply trusted that the other states will follow the particular rule or norm.

The presence or absence of hedging strategies is not a sufficient indicator to say that two states have a trusting relationship or not. Hedging strategies, or the lack thereof, might exist for other reasons. But the lack of hedging strategies, particularly in areas of importance to states, provides a first piece of evidence that trust might be a causal factor in the behavior that we are witnessing. The next step is to show that there is a strong social norm related to this phenomenon. If we can satisfy both criteria, that these norms are both widely recognized as being socially important among a set of actors and, behaviorally, are not subject to hedging strategies, then we can make claims that this is not simply a strong norm, but an entrusted one.

With respect to the betrayal, we use an interpretivist methodology that draws on insights from a corpus of official publications and ephemera in Arabic and English gathered between 2014 and

2021. This corpus includes the Al Ula Declaration 2021; the Riyadh Agreement 2013; the Riyadh Agreement of 2014; the GCC Charter and Rules of Procedure for the Commission for Settlement of Disputes; official press releases from the Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Saudi Press Agency, the Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Secretariat General of the GCC; domestic and transnational press articles; and social media commentary from prominent Gulf commentators.

Previous research has suggested that emotions such as betrayal can be studied through their representation and communication (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008: 128; Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014: 505-506). With respect to representation, punishing the offender is a typical response to betrayal, either in the form of the suspension of positive exchange or inflicting costs. Importantly, the purpose of this behavior is not just to ensure a return to the status quo behavior, but to test the sincerity of the betrayer (Fitness, 2001: 92; Dirks et al., 2009: 70). As a result, some studies suggest that betrayal leads to a larger punishment than similar actions not characterized by betrayal (Koehler and Gershoff, 2003; Bohnet and Zeckhauser, 2004). With respect to communication, we will also look for discursive evidence that betrayal is the means through which this conflict is being portrayed.

But we can additionally look for acknowledgement of the betrayal from the other state. When a betrayer wishes to come back into the fold, it usually comes in the form of putting themselves into a submissive posture to alleviate the initial power imbalance created between the two parties by the betrayal (Fitness, 2001: 84). It also provides information to the betrayed that the betrayer has understood the transgression and experienced redemption (Dirks et al., 2009: 71). This usually takes place through social rituals that both settle the initial transgression and reestablish future expectations (Dirks et al., 2009: 72; Govier and Verwoerd, 2002: 193-194), and can include behaviors and discourse that emphasize a positive promotion of trustworthiness (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009: 134). We can therefore be more confident that betrayal is a relevant factor when we see attempts by the betrayer to redress the betrayal in the face of punishment by the betrayed party.

Finally, with the betrayal there will be a potentially dramatic decrease in the level of trust between the betrayer and the betrayed. Trust has been broken in the betrayal, so the betrayer must signal their

trustworthiness in an environment where these signals will be discounted (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009: 133). This is exactly what makes a return to the political status quo difficult. This should be observable as an increase in the level of hedging activity directly related to the nature of the offense, though there could be spillover effects to other issues as well.

In summary, within this data we are looking for both behavioral manifestations of betrayal, which focus on strong reactions to punish the betrayer and attempts by the betrayer to make themselves humble, discursive manifestations that suggest that this was a frame through which the conflict was viewed, and an increase in the level of hedging after the betrayal that suggests that trust has been damaged.

Entrusted Norms and Security Politics in the GCC

Most research in international politics on the GCC is through the lens of an international alliance facing external threats, often grounded in realist logics that stress the importance of external security and the role of material incentives – logics that are often used to understand the Arab world more generally (Adib-Moghaddam, 2006: 4; Barnett, 1998: 1; Wright, 2006: 73; Kamrava, 2011: 1). From this perspective, the competition between the two regional powers, Iraq and Iran, is the primary security threat that initiates and sustains the alliance (Legrenzi, 2011: 44; Barnett, 1998: 201). Consequently, much of the literature has focused on the GCC's (in)ability to pacify relations within the alliance and to produce common defense institutions.

Constructivist studies of the GCC have little to dispute with this assessment, arguing that the GCC is a traditional alliance that coheres when motivated by external threats, but otherwise tends to become redundant when these external threats disappear (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 161; Guzansky, 2014: 652). This pessimistic outlook is supported by a history of interference in each other's affairs (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 162), leading Michael Barnett and F. Gregory Gause to argue that "when it comes to regime security, some GCC states still see other GCC states as potential threats." (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 185) This problem can be also seen in more recent work,

where scholars employed the concept of 'normlessness' to discuss the perennial problems of norm compliance within the GCC (Sadiki and Saleh, 2020).

Thus, from both realist and constructivist perspectives, there seems to be little trust to write about. As Abdul Bilgin put it explicitly from a realist perspective, "Distrustfulness [is] inherent in Qatari-Saudi relations." (Bilgin, 2018: 115) Similarly, those working from a constructivist perspective argued that the GCC was "not initially intended as a trust-building organization." (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 179) While there has been some deepening cooperation among GCC members, there is still a great deal of "mistrust and suspicion" among the leadership – and importantly from a constructivist perspective, this mistrust continues despite the creation of an overarching identity among the states (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 163).

This pessimism likely accounts for why the current literature on the GCC crisis has primarily interpreted it from a realist perspective. This includes scholars who argue that the crisis was caused by shifts in the underlying power among the GCC states, sometimes attached to either Saudi Arabia or Qatar's desire to be more dominant in the region (Stephans, 2017: 12; Lynch, 2017: 14). Others expand these ideas to the regional context, suggesting that the increase in relative power among the GCC states, compared to Iraq and Iran, have led to the conflict (Asisian, 2018). Absent a strong external threat, the argument goes, the GCC falls apart (Ulrichsen, 2018: 50). Some point to differences in preferences over religion and their effect on status as the contributing factor (Gause III, 2017: 10-11; Lynch, 2017: 15).

The purpose of this paper is not to rehash the realism versus constructivism debate. One can accept that international structural pressures on states set the stage for the crisis without exhausting the explanatory potential for other factors. This is particularly the case given our central research question: what might account for this dramatic and sustained break in diplomatic relations between the states of the GCC? The member states of the GCC have had no small share of disputes with each other over political, economic, and territorial issues (Ulrichsen, 2018). So why has the recent dispute

between Qatar and Saudi Arabia escalated in a way that previous disputes did not, and why has it been so difficult to rectify?

This question has been overlooked entirely by most accounts of the crisis, and the explanations that do exist encounter difficulty when answering it. Some have framed it as a miscalculation on either the Saudi or Qatari side (Lynch, 2017: 16; Asisian, 2018), but stop short of articulating exactly why this miscalculation occurred. But the nature of this miscalculation is important if we want to explain the behavior we see in this crisis, particularly since it has led to strategic losses for Saudi Arabia – as Marc Lynch notes, Iran has used the crisis as an opportunity to improve relations with Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait. If Saudi Arabia is as occupied with its fear of Iran as some realists suggest, why would it rip the GCC apart over its grievances with Qatar? Furthermore, if this crisis is about clear problems of external security facing the GCC members, then why has the coalition against Qatar remained limited? (Lynch, 2017: 14-15)

We argue that the concept of entrusted norms helps to answer these questions. It helps us to understand why this crisis happened and helps us to understand why reconciliation has been so difficult. We argue that the problem with current analyses of the crisis lies in the fact that realist scholars have continued to focus on traditional international security problems, that is, the way that alliances suffer from problems of potential abandonment and entrapment, struggles for sovereignty and independence, and whether the alliance members themselves fear each other militarily (Bilgin, 2018; Mason, 2014; Miller and Verhoeven, 2020). This view, however, does not account for an equally pressing security problem that Gulf States face: that of internal regime security (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 162; Guzansky, 2014: 640; Bianco and Stansfield, 2018; Bilgin, 2018: 118).

Given the autocratic nature of the regimes, destabilizing discourses are often more immediately threatening than the militaries of other states (Gause III, 2003: 2; Barnett, 1998: 7-12). Some scholars have noted how this has affected external relations, for example, with states like Saudi Arabia "balanced against states that were militarily weaker but hostile to their ruling regimes, and allied (sometimes to their later regret) with states that presented potentially greater threats from a

conventional military standpoint" (Gause III, 2003: 2). This priority towards internal regime security can also be seen in the outcomes of the limited cooperation found in the GCC. Though scholars argue that the GCC has not come close to achieving the goals of its founding charter, it has managed to achieve a high level of cooperation on internal security (Legrenzi, 2011: 1). Furthermore, internal security has been overlooked as a domain for trusting relationships, given the extensive focus on issues of distrust with respect to external security otherwise found in the literature. But to move our argument forward, we need to come to an understanding of the social norms that underpin the maintenance of internal security, which we argue are rooted in the social foundations of GCC member states.

The GCC is only open to Gulf states that have important commonalties, typically monarchical systems underpinned by kin-ordered social solidarities (Barnett and Gause III, 1998: 164-167; Barnett, 1998: 201). Scholars have already documented the role played by identity in the creation of the organization noting the promotion of the peninsular-centric *Khaleeji* (Arab Gulf) identity (Bianco and Stansfield, 2018: 622; Krieg, 2019: 27) This identity co-exists alongside ongoing modernization processes in the region, being both 'rooted, ancient, and tribal but also transnational, modern and cosmopolitan' (Cooke, 2014: 164) These norms and their contestation are a defining feature of Arab politics, since they "establish the parameters of what constituted legitimate action and thus represented an act or power." (Barnett, 1998: 7) Leaders of GCC states focus on the symbolic accumulation of power based on perceived alignment with pre-established norms. This, in turn, underwrites their domestic support and provides internal security (Barnett, 1998: 36).

The common *khaleeji* identity incorporates common norms that allow the organization to operate without the requirement of a high degree of institutionalization. The GCC itself has very little in the way of supporting staff or civil servants dedicated to the implementation of the various decrees (Heard-Bey, 2006: 217). There are therefore very few institutional hedges against the potential defection of GCC states from these norms. But as Frauke Heard-Bey (2006: 218) puts it, "what the GCC is lacking in Brussels-style clout, it makes up it for in the strengths of its common bonds, which

encompass the ruling houses and the ordinary nationals in these countries." These social norms include the focus on informal mediation, consultation, advice-making, and consensus (Legrenzi, 2011: 42, 88; Heard-Bey, 2006: 209, 219; Wright, 2006: 83). The desirability of consensus (*ijma*), particularly, is rooted in informal political traditions of Eastern Arabia and Sunni Islamic jurisprudence (Heard-Bey, 2006: 218; Legrenzi, 2008: 88), and is institutionalized within the decision-making processes, effectively giving every state a veto (Ulrichsen, 2018: 50).[4]

These norms serve a specific political purpose: they set the rules of the game for interstate dispute resolution, allowing for the voicing of disagreement while preserving the pursuit of collective and individual dignity (Barnett, 1998: 45).[5] The member states lodge complaints through the GCC, acting as a third party, which thus conceals the connection of the aggrieved party to its own grievance, allowing disagreements and political contestation while preserving the individual and collective dignity that helps to underpin the internal security of the regimes.

These shared values create "a reliable foundation for the essential co-operation ... [and] ultimately for the inner coherence of the GCC." (Heard-Bey, 2006: 219) As Joseph Kostiner (2006: 111) put it, "the GCC states [have] demonstrated persistence and perseverance in their efforts to maintain calm and stable relations within the GCC, with reasonable results." Consequently, where disagreement exists, GCC members have traditionally settled matters in private. Unlike Arab politics more generally, there has historically been less use of overt political tactics among the GCC members that might threaten this internal order.

While there exists a great deal of scholarship on these norms and their importance for political interaction in the region, we wish to make a slightly different argument: that these norms not only

[4] See Articles 4 and 10, GCC Charter

[5] Arab states in general focus much more time on symbolic politics to increase their security and influence other states, for instance, by portraying their opponents as being outside of a consensus, to which their opponents spent a great deal of time defending themselves, since "they knew that to be perceived as violating a norm of Arabism could easily summon regional censure and, more consequentially, domestic turmoil." Barnett MN (1998) *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in regional order.* New York: Columbia University Press. Alternatively, when Arab states wish for a détente between them, they suspend open criticism of each other which would otherwise pose a threat because of the "shared normative order that leaves them mutually susceptible to and dependent on each other for dignity, honor, and approval." Ibid.

exist, but are entrusted. They have a clear social importance, but also a lack of clear institutionalized hedging strategies to offset the risk of defection. Almost all international organizations have entrenched systems of monitoring and sanctioning to hedge against potential defection over central goals, and these exist across institutions with diverse purposes, be it nuclear weapon non-proliferation, environmental regulation, trade, or human rights compliance. Similar hedging strategies against defection are not found in the GCC. There are no official monitoring agencies to ensure that diplomacy is conducted in this way, nor are there official sanctions for defection. In fact, the official way that disputes are settled in the GCC is though the creation of the "Commission for the Settlement of Disputes," which has no permanent structure, consisting of an ad hoc composition of members depending on the nature of the dispute (1982a: Article 10)[6]

But importantly from our perspective of entrusted norms, they are also the rules of the game that states *assume others will follow*, thus creating this lack of demand for hedging strategies. In the domain of these norms, they have a trusting relationship, as they "behave in a manner suggesting that there is no risk of defection, or at least significantly less than might otherwise be expected." (Keating and Ruzicka, 2014: 761) This behavior is particularly notable given that these norms are tied to a very high-risk outcome if defection occurs, the public loss of face, which can lead to consequent problems of internal security that all GCC states strive to avoid.

But the significance of entrusted norms is not simply how they are lightly policed, if policed at all. It is that when they are broken it does not lead to mere disappointment, but a reaction of betrayal. The political consequence of betrayal is that it is not enough for a norm breaker to return to the status quo behavior. Additional amends must be made. If we examine the history of the GCC crisis thus far, we can see how these issues of betrayal, attempts at reconciliation, distrust, and entrenched conflict, lead this to be a much more complicated political phenomenon than both the current

[6] See also (1982b) Co-operation Council For the Arab States of the Gulf Rules of Procedure United Nations Treaty Series, 158-170.

literature on the crisis puts forward and the current literature in social constructivism provides theoretical support for.

Although the GCC crisis relates to relatively recent developments between its member states, its roots lie partially within the historical relationship between Qatar and Saudi Arabia which predates the establishment of the GCC in 1981. Contentious exchanges between the two have been evident since at least the 1965 border agreement (Schofield, 2011: 28-30). Although Qatar was considered one of Saudi Arabia's most loyal allies within the GCC between 1970 and 1995 (Gause III, 2015: 169), the early 1990s also saw disputes over the border at Abu al-Khafous (Miller and Verhoeven, 2020: 8) and over gas pipeline development (Krane and Wright, 2014: 10; Fineren, 2012). Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani's ascension to power as Emir of Qatar in 1995 saw the relationship become particularly fractious as an emboldened Qatar embarked on a series of autonomous profile-raising foreign policy initiatives, including hosting US troops on Qatari soil in the new Al Udeid airbase and the establishment of Arabic-language Al Jazeera in 1996.

The arrival of Al Jazeera drove the disagreements and disputes among the GCC members into a much more public frame. Al Jazeera's willingness to broadcast critical views of Arab governments – with the exception of Qatar – began to complicate a picture of a Qatar willing to respect the pursuit of collective and individual dignity within the GCC. Saudi Arabia, in particular, expressed its frustration towards Al Jazeera. In 2001, the Lebanese daily *Al Anwar* reported a senior Saudi royal at a GCC summit in Oman accusing Al Jazeera of 'defamation' of the GCC, 'harming' its members' royal families, and destabilizing the Arab world through 'behavior that smacks of settling of scores in a hateful and insulting manner' (Ahmen, 2002). Al Jazeera's later broadcast of a talk show panel featuring Saudi dissidents was rumored to have caused the recall of the Saudi ambassador to Qatar in September 2002, seemingly escalating the dispute up to the state level (2008). In October 2002, a statement issued by 5 out of 6 GCC information ministers at a regular meeting in Muscat recommended 'halting cooperation with Al Jazeera's offices, presenters and employees' and 'urging the public and private sectors to stop commercial cooperation' if Al Jazeera failed to 'adopt a more polite tone' (Ahmen, 2002). However,

the restoration of the ambassador in 2008 follows the pattern of dispute and resolution that both states have historically followed, after coverage was toned down 'as a prelude to Saudi-Qatari rapprochement.' (2008).

While this incident shows that Qatar's policies caused serious tensions with Saudi Arabia, the entrusted norm of public consensus to ensure the preservation of individual and collective dignity remained intact in several respects. First, the format of shows on Al Jazeera ensured that Qatar could not be accused of criticizing other states directly. Its most controversial show, The Opposite Direction (*al ittijah - al muakis*), featured call-in segments where members of the public could contribute their views. Guests often held divergent political viewpoints and, more importantly, were from Arab states other than Qatar. Though a seemingly minor point, this meant that whatever was said on the program by either the guests or public callers could not be attributed to state-owned Al Jazeera, and therefore not directly to the state of Qatar by extension. Second, when Saudi officials publicly complained about this coverage, their target was Al Jazeera, not the state of Qatar with whom they had their political grievance. Finally, the recall of the Saudi ambassador discussed above was never officially publicized, which would otherwise signal an open rift, to the extent that there are still conflicting reports over exactly when the event happened.

The result was a negotiated settlement that allowed all to avoid embarrassment. Saudi Arabia managed to elicit toned-down coverage from Al Jazeera and Qatar avoided public criticism from Saudi Arabia, that instead decided to establish its own satellite news channel, Al Arabiya, in 2003. Importantly, Saudi Arabia, despite its clear position of power, did not initiate hedging activities to police the norm in response to what could be seen as a growing threat to its dignity and, therein, its internal security. Although opening Al Arabiya might be construed as a hedge, it is not a hedge against Qatari defection with respect to the norm we are interested in. In fact, it preserves the norm because it represents a way in which political disagreement can be aired while preserving the dignity of all parties involved. Finally, the paucity of news coverage and precise details surrounding the 2002 ambassadorial recall shows that there was little attempt to publicly shame Qatar in a way that would break the norm. Despite the

differences in foreign policy preferences, both states were able to come back to the table and negotiate a way to move forward that maintained the GCC's entrusted norm of individual and collective dignity.

Bolstered by Al Jazeera's success, Qatar expanded its foreign policy activism to cultivate a regional reputation for leadership and mediation. Qatari mediation was involved in Yemen (2008-2010), Lebanon (2008), and Darfur (2008-2010) and worked to resolve disputes between Sudan and Chad (2009) and between Djibouti and Eritrea (2010) (Ulrichsen, 2014: 6). Deciding to support the direction of events alongside other GCC members, Qatar pursued military intervention in Libya and Syria and organized economic assistance for Tunisia and Egypt. Within the GCC however, Qatar constrained its ambitions, cognizant of Saudi Arabia's larger influence in its neighbors and opted for cautious coordination with GCC actions in Bahrain and Yemen (Ulrichsen, 2014: 8).

This reputation for stability and the presidency of the Arab League in 2011-2012 gave the Qatari leadership the confidence to support the rising Islamist forces in transitioning countries following the outbreak of the Arab Spring. This decision brought a serious challenge to the procedure of dispute resolution because it created both a common internal security threat to all members of the GCC and a challenge to the GCC's shared belief in fraternal reciprocity, *i.e.*, the assumption that all members would behave appropriately and in line with GCC interests. As we will argue, it created a perception that Qatar infringed upon the norm of individual and collective dignity preservation by taking a contradictory position to the GCC during the Arab Spring, causing widespread humiliation for all parties, leading Saudi Arabia to react in an exceptional way.

The rupture followed Egypt's designation of the ousted Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, while Qatar provided refuge for ousted Brotherhood officials. However damaged the relations had become by Qatar's international activism up to that point, this behavior led Saudi Arabia to try to restore the confidence of the other GCC states, who had been opened up to potential embarrassment on the international stage: they had already backed the new government in Egypt with a public pledge of $12 billion to prop up the Egyptian economy (Ravinsky, 2013).

As a result of Qatar's apparent disregard for consensus over an important security issue, Saudi Arabia reacted strongly, responding publicly to Qatar's transgressions rather than using the usual back channels. Without even issuing a public ultimatum, which might be expected in normal disputes between states, on June 5, 2015, Saudi Arabia closed its land borders. It took 18 days for the ultimatum to be produced, which included reducing diplomatic relations with Iran, declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, and closing Al Jazeera (Sailer and Roll, 2017: 1-2). These demands, followed by Saudi Arabia's later expectation of monthly reviews to ensure Qatar's compliance with them (Sailer and Roll, 2017: 2) demonstrates the introduction of a clear institutional hedging strategy against future defection.

Even at the time, some commentators argued that the demands did not make sense and could be counterproductive to Saudi Arabia's credibility (Zafirov, 2017: 196). But in line with our argument, they were demands that would humble Qatar enough to restore the face lost by the insult and reinstate the image of consensus among the member states. Saudi Arabia and the GCC had assumed they could rely on Qatar to toe the line given the seriousness of the challenges to regime security posed by the Arab Spring. In addition to projecting a disunited GCC at a time of acute crisis, Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood in particular causes further humiliation by endorsing a group rumored to 'oppose the absolute rule of the Gulf's hereditary rulers' (2014a).

While some commentators argued that this crisis was "limited in its scope" (Kabalan, 2018: 24) relative to what would happen three years later, given the established rules in GCC diplomacy at the time, these were shocking moves. Saudi Arabia subsequently formed a coalition with UAE and Bahrain, who all recalled their ambassadors from Doha (2014b). The dispute also turned highly personal, with Saudi and Emirati politicians directly and publicly attacking and insulting the leadership of Qatar (Sailer and Roll, 2017: 3). We argue that this was such a dramatic rupture from the GCC members' previously established preferences for dealing with internal disagreements that it provides initial evidence that this was a betrayal reaction.

We can also look to Qatar's reaction to see dynamics of betrayal at work. According to the betrayal literature, Saudi Arabia's status as the aggrieved party in this dispute meant that it was incumbent on Qatar to make amends: and we argue that Qatar attempted to do just that. In response to this previously unthinkable public shaming, Qatar did not similarly recall its diplomats, as might be expected in normal diplomatic practice for international disputes, instead opting to stay silent. The betrayal literature also suggests that parties wishing to rebuilding trust after betrayal must openly and actively demonstrate that they are open to taking additional costs to regain the betrayed party's favor. We argue that this is exactly what Qatar attempted to do. Again, despite being the recipient of a public shaming, they continued to take on international duties which matched GCC consensus priorities. Meetings between November 2013 and November 2014 provided a formal yet private channel of communication by which to reset the GCC agenda (Sciutto and Herb, 2017; Bianco and Stansfield, 2018).[7]

Qatar then embarked on a public strategy of active deference towards the GCC in the period between March 2014 and May 2017. This included public symbolic politics that attempted to reposition the hierarchy after an offense, such as in November 2014 when the ruler of Qatar kissed the forehead of the monarch of Saudi Arabia, a gesture of respect for elders (Gause III, 2015). Qatar did not issue a declaration to remove the Muslim Brotherhood and Freedom and Justice Party leaders from Qatar, but there were mixed reports over whether some were privately asked to leave (Kirkpatrick, 2014a), while some left of their own accord (Kirkpatrick, 2014b). At the 2014 GCC annual summit, held in Doha, Qatar backed GCC priorities, such as backing the government of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt and the Libyan government in Tobruk. Qatar furthermore closed the Al Jazeera channel that was devoted to Egyptian news, which was known for its criticism of the Sisi government and support of the Muslim Brotherhood (Gause III, 2015). While some doubted whether this was a real change of heart on the part of Qatar, with a senior Qatari official anonymously telling the New York Times that

[7] Although GCC protocol ensures the secrecy of meetings, the texts of the 2013 Riyadh Agreement (23rd Nov 2013) and the 2014 Riyadh Supplementary Agreement (16th Nov 2014) were published by Saudi owned pan-Arab news channel Al Arabiya and CNN in June 2017.

the joint communiqué was merely a 'press release,' (Kirkpatrick, 2014a) what is important for our argument is not that their political interests aligned, but that Qatar put effort into ensuring that the public impression of unity and preservation of dignity returned.

In response, the Saudi, Bahraini, and Emirati ambassadors were all restored to Qatar in November 2014, and Qatar was invited to join the Arab coalition in Yemen signaling Qatar's re-entry into the GCC fold (2014a). Upon assuming the presidency of the GCC in 2015, Qatar continued with their confidence-building measures designed to placate the fears of other GCC states, for example, by recalling its ambassadors to Egypt over ISIL in Febuary 2015 (2015) and recalling the Qatari envoy to Iran following attacks on Saudi missions in Tehran, matching Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (2016). Through this series of actions, we argue that Qatar attempted to regain the trust of its GCC partners by moving back towards the behavioral status quo, taking on additional trust-building measures to make up for the betrayal, and avoiding any retaliatory actions that might continue the open conflict.

According to the current constructivist scholarship, one might expect that with Qatar back in the fold, there would be a cessation of hostilities between the states. If norms are not being broken, there is no need for further punishment. The problem with entrusted norms, as we argue, is that it is very difficult to return to the political status quo by returning to the behavioral status quo. As Kristian Coates Ulrichsen put it, despite the "meaningful acts by the new Qatari leadership that exhibited a willingness to acknowledge and address the perceived grievances of its three regional adversaries, … they proved insufficient to Qatar's detractors" (Ulrichsen, 2019: 33). Once trust is lost through betrayal, it is difficult to repair.

In 2017 Saudi Arabia accused the Qatari leadership of violating the then secret agreement that ended the 2014 dispute, resulting in an air, sea, and land blockade on Qatar, in what some called an "unprecedented measure in the history of Saudi Arabian-Qatari relations." (Bilgin, 2018: 127) The list of demands on the part of the Saudi and its allies was extensive. It included stopping all forms of military and intelligence cooperation with Iran, applying US sanctions against Iran, ending bilateral

cooperation with Turkey, cutting off support for several alleged terrorist organizations, closing down Al Jazeera, and aligning Qatar's policies with the other Gulf states (2019: viii).

Several commentators noted nothing but complete capitulation or even regime change would now suffice (Baabood, 2019: 167; Bilgin, 2018: 127-128, Asisian, 2018 #2174; Sailer and Roll, 2017: 2). The other parties would now only accept heavy hedges against the risk of Qatar betraying them again. This included a media campaign that publicly disparaged Qatar's ruling family and sowed doubt as to its legitimacy, an "unprecedented development" since this discourse potentially threatens all monarchial families in the region (Kabalan, 2018: 25). The disproportionality in response can also be seen in Saudi proposals to build a canal along its border with Qatar to turn it into an island (Pradhan, 2018: 438; Harb, 2018: 18-19) – a move difficult to interpret as a rational response that would improve Saudi security. We can also see these ideas appear discursively, with commentators from the United Arab Emirates being particularly active noting that "there is no trust, it has is gone" (Wintour, 2017) and setting out publicly the contours of the betrayal perceived by Saudi Arabia, contrasting its "commitment and loyalty" with a "treachery committed towards friends and allies" attributed to Qatar's alleged "duplicity." (Gargash, 2017)

Despite Qatar's attempts to come back into the fold by following the previous normative order, it clearly did not manage to reconstitute the political status quo. Reconciling and rebuilding these relationships was unlikely to take place through the previously normal shuttle mediation and search for consensus, and it was unclear what steps needed to be taken to solve the crisis that did not involve the complete loss of sovereignty for Qatar. Some argued that any chance of immediate de-escalation was unlikely (Pradhan, 2018: 441; Harb, 2018: 18), while Mattias Sailer and Stephan Roll argued that the most likely outcome would be an ongoing Cold War between the states (Sailer and Roll, 2017: 3).

The diplomatic quagmire seemingly came to an abrupt halt when a surprise border reopening was announced by Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 2021. The YouTube video facilitated the termination of the blockade, citing the Emir of Kuwait's role in bringing about 'a bright new page in

fraternal relations,' to be formalized at the then upcoming 41st GCC summit in Al Ula, Saudi Arabia. Following an embrace between Saudi and Qatari leaders on arrival, Saudi officials hailed 'the turning of the page on all points of difference' (Khalid, 2021). Qatari officials reciprocated Saudi Arabia's public actions confirming support for the principle of unity at the heart of the Al Ula statement (2021a), noting a commitment to joint security work anchored in 'good neighborliness' and 'mutual respect' (2021d), echoing the summit's closing call for 'desisting from provocative acts' (2021e: Article 61). However, the optimistic tone of Al Arabiya's coverage of the Al Ula deal contrasted with Al Jazeera's circumspect framing of a 'solidarity and stability' deal cautiously welcomed by Qataris (2021c; 2021b). At the time of writing, Qatar has not capitulated to the original demands of the Quartet.

Against this backdrop, the consensus reached seems fragile, a step towards dispute resolution rather than a full reconciliation. Furthermore, the UAE press in particular characterized the deal as a prelude to rebuilding trust, noting continued points of disagreement regarding regional issues (2021b). This framing is particularly notable given the number of times trust, or in this case, the lack of trust, comes up as a reason for the lack of progress in returning to a political status quo in the wider commentary (Ulrichsen, 2019: 32; Baabood, 2019: 162; Harb, 2018: 14; Asisian, 2018; Ulrichsen, 2018: 56; Macaron, 2018: 107) We agree with these arguments, but contribute a novel theoretical framework for understanding exactly what role trust has in shaping these outcomes.

Conclusion

May Darwich recently noted that "the Middle East remains largely invisible in IR theory development." (Fawcett, 2017: 9) It is our hope that, through this paper, we have taken one step in rectifying this problem by showing how the concept of entrusted norms can explain the dramatic and sustained break in diplomatic relations between the states of the GCC. Entrusted norms are a special type of norms because their entrusted nature leads to different patterns of policing, in that they have few to no hedging strategies enacted against potential defection, and different patterns of response, in that breaking them results not simply in disappointment, but betrayal. While this creates a new class of norms that we have shown can have analytical value in understanding behavior in

international politics, we additionally believe that our argument contributes to more general themes within social constructivism, emotions, and trust research.

For social constructivism, this argument demonstrates how the concept of trust can be incorporated into constructivist research on norms to deepen our understanding of empirical phenomena. But it additionally probes reasonably unexplored theoretical ground in its examination of the consequences of norm violation. The concept of entrusted norms provides one model to understand why certain norm violations might lead to differential defection responses. But it also opens up a broader research agenda focused on developing theory that explains the duration and severity of punishment for norm transgressive behaviors. In other words, is there anything else about the nature of particular norms or particular actors that might affect responses to norm violation?

For research on emotions, this paper provides a casual mechanism between the existing social structure and emotions, and the subsequent effect of these emotions on the social structures. This compliments previous research that has looked into how other social structures, such as culture, affects emotions (Mercer, 2014: 523) and research on the effects of moral outrage (Löwenheim and Heimann, 2008) or respect and disrespect (Wolf, 2011) in international politics, by highlighting how entrusted norms, a previously unconsidered concept, can be a source of this emotional state.

And finally, for trust research it places a new focus on how informal norms can be entrusted and domains of trust outside of external security issues. While there is a significant amount of research on trust and international security, it primarily focusses on the existence of trust or distrust with respect to the potential threat of foreign militaries. Additionally, the domain of trust is always something concrete – the final agreement, the development of policies, a formal concession, or an official act of recognition between the states (or lack thereof) (Larson, 1997; Kydd, 2001; Brugger et al., 2013; Hasenclever and Kasten, 2016; Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010; Wheeler, 2018). This research suggests that trust scholars should expand their thinking both when it comes to examining how trust affects more informal norms of conduct and domains that lie outside of traditional external security issues.

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